

**From:** [Oh, Peter](#)  
**To:** [OLEM OEM ALL EOC Positions](#)  
**Cc:** [Abrams, Nancy](#); [Mason, Steve](#)  
**Subject:** Fw: Daily Tip for Relieving Stress # 17 and Final  
**Date:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 1:58:41 PM  
**Attachments:** [image003.jpg](#)  
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Folks,

Please see the note below from our colleagues in Region 6. Please remember to take care of yourself while you take care of your work.

And thanks for the note, Steve and Nancy!

Pete Oh  
EOC Manager  
202-557-9202

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**From:** Abrams, Nancy  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 8:57 AM  
**To:** Oh, Peter  
**Subject:** FW: Daily Tip for Relieving Stress # 17 and Final  
Hi Pete

Steve sends these every morning. Just thought it might be a good thing to share with our folks. Just a thought. Of course you would have to delete Steve's number as someone to talk to.

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**From:** Mason, Steve  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 20, 2017 6:01 AM  
**To:** Mason, Steve  
**Subject:** Daily Tip for Relieving Stress # 17 and Final

**17. and Final.** Each of you may have a different reason for joining EPA. But I believe all of us truly feel that working at EPA is a way to improve our world. And all of you filled important positions during this response: emergency response to directly protect the community from a release; assessments to ensure the drinking water and air was safe for the residents; removing the orphan containers that could pose a future threat; listening to community concerns and providing information on returning safely to their homes; or supporting the field activities in the REOC through it all. Bottom line: The people along the coast of Texas may never know what all EPA did to help them recover this disaster, but know your efforts will always be appreciated.

**16. Stay in touch.** When you are deployed to the field, or working extraordinarily long hours, it can be easy to focus on the immediate world around you. Daily reports, meetings, conference calls, and just the work itself can overwhelm our time. But don't forget to regularly call your family and friends. My best friend from grade school through college is in Houston. Unfortunately, 35 years later, we have not stayed in touch as much. So I tracked him down and was able to ensure he and his family are fine. We are now texting back and forth on a

regular basis. And just talking to him has brought back great memories of our childhood. ...and when you talk to your family at home, understand it may be hard on them to have you gone also.

**15. When you get back.** Take a little time off for yourself. Even if you have to come back to work immediately after being demobilized, transition back into your normal job slowly. Make sure you recognize if you have any lingering issues from your response time, and talk to others. Do not let it build up and fester ... and do not make any big decisions, including financial, until you have rested and have a clearer mind.

**14. Hang out.** Research shows those who have social support tend to react less negatively to stress than those who are trying to deal with it on their own. This is because socializing stimulates the production of the hormone oxytocin (no, not the stuff you used as a teenager to fight acne), which has an anxiety-reducing effect. So if you are starting to feel a little overwhelmed by a situation, or just want to relax a little in general, ask a couple of others to go for a walk. While you're walking, talk about anything other than work and the disaster. Sports, families, etc. And remember the golden rule of conversation... stay away from politics and religion... you're trying to relieve stress, not increase it... After all, STRESSED is just DESSERTS spelled backwards...

**13. Plan ahead.** Fight anxious thoughts in advance by preparing for the day ahead... and of course, then a crisis will pop up and mess it all up... but at least have a schedule for the daily things (conference calls and meetings that you have to be part of)... then prioritize those things you have to do (SitRep inputs, etc.)... and most importantly, keep things to a routine... put your car keys in the same spot in the hotel, trailer, or house... keep your electronic gadgets in the same spot or on your body... that way you don't spend 10 minutes every day frantically looking for those things.

**12. Worry.** Yes, we can cause ourselves to freak out, but only for a certain amount of time. When something weighs heavily on your mind, or you believe something terrible is most definitely going to occur, commit to only creating that worry for 10-20 minutes or less. Think of all the possible outcomes of the scenario, figure out some game plans, and then quit thinking about it after 10-20 minutes go by. Then move onto another issue. We have this posted in our REOC, which is a good thing to remember each day...

### **CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE**

**No one, but you, can tell you how to feel today,  
Don't allow someone else to influence your choice.**

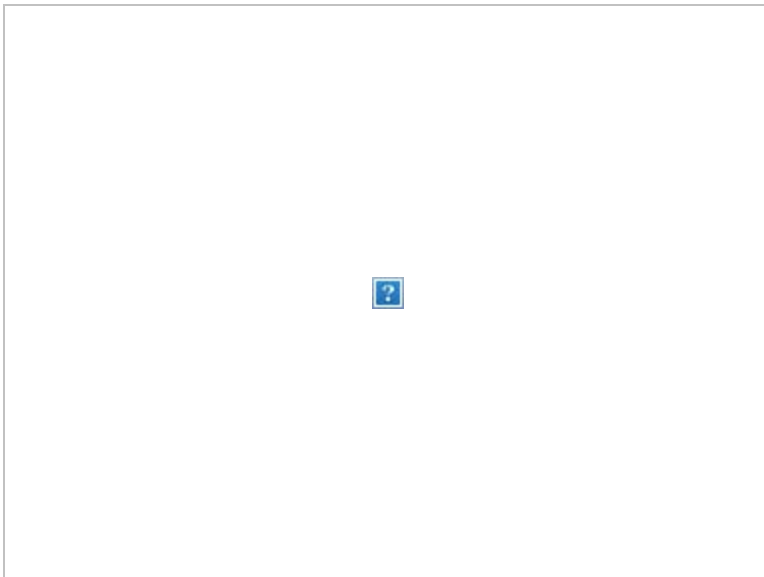
**11. Be silent.** Plan for a time when you can completely disconnect. Even if it is for 5-10 minutes per day. That means phone off, no emails, no TV, no news, nothing. There's evidence that too much noise can boost our stress levels, so schedule some silent time among all the craziness of this event.

**10. This May be the Most Important One.** During a disaster response, such as this, you may build friendships you did not have before, working with people from other regions, or even other programs within your region. That's a good thing. But just as importantly, it is easy to ruin a friendship during stressful times also. If you want to still be a friend after this is over

with, treat your friends with respect, and do not jump on them just because things are not much fun. Your real friends will be here for you now, and in the future... as long as you don't run them off...

**09. Play around (just not too much!).** Kids and animals seem to have a natural ability to play, without stressing about their overflowing inboxes or the beat-down meetings and conference calls. Until upper management authorizes cookies, milk, and nap time each afternoon, we all have to take personal responsibility to relax. Watch a sitcom or movie after work. And if you go to dinner together, force yourselves not to talk about work, the disaster, or other things that just keep you frustrated. But be a little careful... while you may think a good practical joke will lighten the mood in the work area, understand some people do not have a sense of humor...

One of our wonderful response personnel shared this with me on how he deals with issues... this is good advice for all us...



**08. Learn to breathe.** This sounds too simple, but a useful tool to prevent panic attacks or reduce peaks of stressfulness, the breath is also a great marker of where your anxiety level is at throughout the day. Short, shallow breaths signify stress and anxiety in the brain and body. On the flip side, consciously breathing, plus lengthening and strengthening the breath helps send signals to the brain that it's okay to relax. So if you find yourself stressed out, find a quiet, comfortable place to sit down. take a normal breath then try a deep breath, breathe in slowly through your nose, allowing your chest and lower belly to rise as you fill your lungs, let your abdomen expand fully, and now breathe out slowly through your mouth (or your nose, if that feels more natural). As you sit comfortably with your eyes closed, deep breathing with, get your mind off the things making you stress out.

**07. Eat right.** Anxiety can throw our bodies totally out of whack: Our appetite might change, or we might crave certain foods (mine has been powdered donuts and Sweet-tarts). But to give the body the support it needs, try eating more of foods that contain nutrients such as vitamin B and omega-3s (polyunsaturated fats, that actually are not bad for us), plus some healthy whole-grain carbohydrates. Studies have linked vitamin B with good mental health,

and omega-3s may help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Whole-grain carbs help regulate levels of serotonin, the “feel-good” neurotransmitter that helps us remain calm. And even though our cravings might be telling us otherwise, research suggests that eating sugary and processed foods can increase symptoms of anxiety (not to mention adding weight).

**06. We’re in this together.** So now you’re going to be working next to someone 12-14-16 hours a day for two weeks (or more). And maybe sharing a RV/trailer with that person. How do you keep from killing each other? There is no sure fire method, but there are some simple things to keep in mind that may help. First remember, all of you in the field have some common/shared thoughts: I don’t want to be here (none of us wanted this to happen); I want to go home; and I’m tired. So when dealing with others in the field, remember that other person is probably thinking the same thing you are. Also, do not keep things bottled up and let them fester. Talk through little issues to ensure they do not grow into big ones. When you have down time (which isn’t much), get to know the other person (hobbies, family, previous experiences, etc.) so you better understand them. Every once in a while, take a separate vacation – while you have to work and sleep together, doesn’t mean you have to be together every minute of the day. And, finally, each person deals with stress differently... **Look out for each other.**

**05. Express gratitude.** Studies have found expressing gratitude helps reduce anxiety, especially when we’re well-rested. So when someone fulfills a request from you, make sure you thank them for the effort. But there are other times when we don’t think about saying “thanks,” which is appropriate or can actually defuse others... When you're receiving a compliment; When you’re running late (thank others for being patient); When you're comforting someone (for sharing what they’re going through); When you're receiving helpful feedback; When you're receiving unfair criticism (this will many times stop them from continuing); When someone gives you unsolicited advice (also helps to stop them); and When you're not sure if you should thank someone.

**04. De-clutter the brain.** Physical clutter = mental clutter. A messy workspace can make it more difficult to relax and make it seem like our work is never-ending. So take a few minutes every day or so to tidy up the work area, and then make a habit of keeping things clean and anxiety-free. If you no longer need a document, file it with the Documentation Unit to help clear off your desk or table. It’ll help us think rationally, and there won’t be as much room for anxiety.

**03 – Turn it Off.** Research reveals that people who use electronic devices (television, phones, tablets, etc.) up to the minute they go to bed are sacrificing a more restful sleep. The visual stimulation to your brain takes a while to wind down. So, to get more rest, turn off that stimulation at least 30 minutes before you try to go to sleep. Instead, open up a fiction book that you have wanted to read, and read a chapter or two until you are ready to close your eyes. And bad news, ebook devices are just as bad as the TV or laptop. So break out the old but trusty paper book. And while it is simple, and may sound silly, if you had a favorite comic strip when you were younger (Garfield, Bloom County, Peanuts), go to a book store and find a compilation of those to re-discover. Not only may they bring a smile before bed, they may

even trigger fond memories of your childhood!

**02 - Smile.** I am sure all of us will sooner or later will get down from the long hours, stress, being away from home, etc. When work has got you down, it's a good idea to take a quick break to relieve stress by finding the humor in your life. Research suggests that laughter can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, so consider checking out a funny clip on the internet, remembering your favorite joke, or simply think of funny things that may have happened in past incidents, to help relieve the stress.

**01 - Get enough sleep.** OK, don't laugh... I know how hard this can be. But, inconsistent sleep can have some serious consequences. Not only does it affect our physical health, but lack of sleep can also contribute to overall anxiety and stress. And sometimes it turns into a vicious cycle, since anxiety often leads to disruptions in sleep. Especially when feeling anxious, try to get a few more minutes of sleep. If it is possible, when exhausted, try to just take a quick 15 minute nap somewhere.

**With Regards, Steve**

